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SUBJECT: FORUM FOR THE FUTURE UPDATE: MEETING AT THE MFA

1.(U) Summary: The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abu Bakr al-Qirbi, summoned G-8, Spanish and Dutch ambassadors, and the head of the Civil Society Coalition for a November 5 meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to discuss the upcoming Forum for the Future. Al-Qirbi urged the ambassadors to ask their capitals to pressure the Egyptians to change their Sharm al-Sheikh conference dates, as this remained a scheduling conflict for the Forum. Al-Qirbi could not confirm President Saleh's participation in the Forum, but mentioned that the President may want to use the opportunity to meet with some foreign ministers. Al-Qirbi asked the Ambassador if Secretary Rice might find time during the Forum to brief ministerial colleagues on the status of the Arab-Israeli peace process. The location change from Aden to Sanaa for the Parallel Civil Society Forum was confirmed by the head of the Civil Society Coalition, who solicited financial support from the ambassadors for the event. Al-Qirbi announced the MFA would provide equipment for a business center for the Parallel Forum. End Summary

2.(U) The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abu Bakr al-Qirbi, summoned G-8, Spanish and Dutch ambassadors, and the head of the Civil Society Coalition for a November 5 meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the upcoming Forum for the Future. Deputy Foreign Minister Mohyaldeen al-Dhabbi, who was also present at the meeting, updated the delegation on Forum logistics by announcing that a website has been established for registration purposes and that the number of delegates to be allowed inside the meeting room was limited to one (minister) plus six (staff), noting that badges would not carry photo identification and would therefore be transferable.

3.(U) In response to the Ambassador's query on whether the scheduling conflict with the Sharm al-Sheikh conference had been resolved, al-Qirbi replied that it had not and that, despite the ROYG's efforts, the Egyptians refuse to change their conference dates. Al-Qirbi said that the ROYG was still attempting to persuade the Egyptian government to change its dates, or at the least, begin the conference the evening of December 5 to allow flight time between Sanaa and Cairo for the ministers. Al-Qirbi urged the ambassadors to ask their capitals to pressure the Egyptians to change their conference dates, as he was concerned about the participation of Arab foreign ministers at the Forum due to the date conflict. (Note: The Ambassador said that we already had raised this with the Egyptian Embassy in Washington. End Note)

4.(U) When asked by the Ambassador if President Saleh planned to participate in the Forum, al-Qirbi answered that at previous forums, the prime ministers of the host country, and not the president, had taken part, adding that President Saleh may still be at his winter residence in Aden when the Forum convenes. Nevertheless, he said the President may want to use the opportunity to meet with some foreign ministers. Al-Qirbi subsequently asked the Ambassador if Secretary of

State Rice might find time during the Forum to brief ministerial colleagues on the status of the Arab-Israeli peace process. The Ambassador replied that he understood the traditional time and place for such an informal discussion was the ministerial dinner, but assured al-Qirbi that the request would be passed to Washington.

5.(U) To conclude the meeting, Ezzadine al-Asbahi from the Human Rights Information and Training Center, and head of the Civil Society Coalition, presented a brief on the Parallel Forum. Al-Asbahi confirmed the attendance of 220 civil society representatives from G-8 and BMENA countries and noted that the Parallel Forum would be moved to Sanaa, from Aden. Al-Asbahi thanked the USG, with specific mention of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), for its financial support of the Parallel Forum. He stated that the Civil Society Coalition needs additional funding, however, and asked the ambassadors to make the Parallel Forum a true G-8 initiative through broad financial support from all the donors, not just the Americans. The Ambassador reiterated al-Asbahi's words and asked that the remaining financial burden be distributed among the G-8 to ensure that the Parallel Forum does not merely receive support from the USG. The ambassadors gave no reply. Al-Qirbi asked that they consider al-Asbahi's request and provide a response to the Ministry in a week's time. Al-Qirbi announced the MFA would provide equipment for a business center for the Parallel Forum.

6.(SBU) Comment: Considering the somber reactions of the G-8, Spanish, and Dutch ambassadors, it is unlikely that the Parallel Forum will receive additional funding from other donors. Al-Asbahi, however, is reaching out to prominent Yemeni businessmen in an effort to make the civil society Forum not strictly a USG and MFA initiative. Regarding the issue of the President's participation in the Forum, al-Qirbi's efforts to play down expectations notwithstanding, we can hardly believe Saleh will absent himself from an event that will allow him to showcase Yemen's - and his own - close and fruitful relations with the world's major powers, especially the US. End Comment
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